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Touching the Orient

Six Sketches by

Sacheverell Sitwell

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To
LOELIA
AND
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THE DINKA

I

THE DINKA

*(This essay is in preface to a poem that has
not yet been published)*

IN THE SPRING OF 1931 I was given an opportunity of going to the Sudan. This was, at the first, a project of no great interest for someone whose ambition to see the Tropics was concerned more with India and the East Indies. All the greater, for this reason, was the revelation of British rule in that immense land. For the whole of this huge territory is run with Roman moderation and sense by a mere handful of British officials.

The twenty-four hours in the desert express from Wadi-Halfa to Khartum are exciting enough. And, below Khartum, there is Omdurman, a negro metropolis with a hundred thousand inhabitants, drawn, it would seem, from every tribe in Africa. Khartum itself was laid out by Lord Kitchener on the plan of a

series of Union Jacks, with large open squares and broad intersecting streets. And, of an evening, the drums of Omdurman, played with savage intensity and in wild variety of rhythm, roll out their music from five miles away, up the Nile, in prelude to the true Africa that lies behind them.

But the real interest of the Sudan only begins beyond Kosti, two hundred miles south of Khartum. Here, the Moslem Arabs are left behind, and we come to the tribes of pagan negroes. The crocodile sprawls on the sandy islands : the hippopotamus cools himself in the river, and only his two little disproportionate ears announce that enormous lumbering body hidden in the water. The birds are indescribable in beauty and variety. The golden-crested ibis preens herself in the rushes : storks and cranes are as numerous as the dwellers in great cities : magnificent eagles soar overhead. There are other birds, nameless, because never seen before. The riverbanks, to either side, are a park of game. Deer, in their hundred kinds, can be seen in herds. The ostrich is but one among a line of ballerinas. Zebras seem to wait to be harnessed for the chariot of a princess in a fairy-story. Zebras

for her summer-chariot (their antipodes, the reindeer, draw her sledge in winter). There is the giraffe, more fanciful still. The lion has his lair in the long tawny grasses. The ruin of certain red trees, on which they love to feed, betrays the elephant. If, far off, certain small towers, like the periscopes of submarines, turn round and round, as in the wind to sniff the airs, it is his herd advancing in a trampling thunder.

These are the animals, and men are no less interesting. One morning we saw a naked figure, more black than charcoal, wading down the shallows. He was waist-high in the river ; and passed the reeds with flashing trident looking for fish to spear. He was the first true savage we saw. That afternoon, landing at a great village of huts, we saw one negro a head and shoulder taller than the others. He was the first of the Dinka ; and by the next evening we were in their midst.

Their home is the east bank of the White Nile. What especially distinguishes them is their inordinate, stork-like length of leg, in which they fully equal the extravagancies in physique ascribed to the negroes by Leo Africanus. They are as peculiar as the pygmies,

or as the race of duck-billed women from the Congo. The Dinka, as often as not, are six feet six inches in height, and, on occasion, as much as seven feet.

They are a pastoral people, and the purpose of this great stature is that they should look out over the marshes upon their herds of cattle. This they do in a characteristic pose, standing on one leg, with the other foot, akimbo, to their knee. Long hours they pass like this, motionless as a statue, and leaning on a long spear. The silhouette of a Dinka, on sentry against the evening sky, is an unforgettable sight.

They are unclothed and naked save for a rust-red cloak that they wear with the dignity of a Roman warrior, giving to this simple cloak the air of expense and elaboration of a dress from the *grandes maisons* of Paris. Their pride, and their carriage, are ineffable. They wear tight-fitting skull-caps of bright blue, or white, beads ; inlaying them, as it were, into their woolly hair ; and fashions are changed in this, so we were told, every year. Bracelets and anklets of beads point, still further, their naturally slim wrists and ankles. They wear an ostrich-plume in their hair and carry a high, knobbed walking-stick.

These are their men. The women are more naked still ; but no more magnificent nudity could be imagined. Their every movement is a revelation. If these are savages, then what are the dwellers in our own poor streets ? The women of the Dinka are, at once, the statues of a golden age and the models of our own contemporary standard of looks. Their small heads, crowned with little caps of beads, their thin hips, the slimness of their limbs, everything about them is of the present, as it is of the antique past. Their features, it must be added, are small and neat, with none of the grossness of the real slave-negro.

Finally, there are the adolescent warriors, who need to be thought of in a class to themselves, because, by the extraordinary manner in which they decorate their faces and bodies, they have ceased to be negroes and have become something quite different. They paint themselves with wood-ashes and with certain kinds of clay so that nothing of their porphyry skins is left. In general, their bodies are of an unreal green, a grey-green, like green under the most violent light of electricity. Their faces, under the elaborate *maquillage* to which they are subjected, are products of the circus

and the limelight. With this, they go entirely naked, carrying, perhaps, a bow and arrows; or a spear and shield. They have a knightly elegance, a softness of tread, and seem, really, to be creatures of another world.

Such are the Dinka, so far as their physical appearance is concerned. Let us consider their history and their environment. They were lost in the world until some seventy years ago. It was the search for the sources of the Nile that first brought the white man into contact with them. Of their own history they know nothing; and their memory extends no further back than the limits of their own personal vision – to grandfathers and great-grandfathers remembered out of their own childhood. They have a vague tradition of having come out of the south. The Dinka were never slave-fodder, like the tribes living nearer to Abyssinia, or the negroes of the Gold Coast. It was from those that the harems of Turkey and Arabia were filled and the plantations of America and the West Indies received their store of black labour. The Dinka were warriors and not slaves; and they are part of the great negro race which includes the Zulus, the Matabele, the Basuto, the Masai. So their tradition is

correct. They came up into the Sudan from the south, probably, according to learned opinion, at the end of the fourteenth, or beginning of the fifteenth, century. During the five hundred years that have elapsed, since then, they have accentuated their own peculiarities by intermarriage, and by the laws of nature. And they have ceased to be warriors and have become cowherds.

In their relatively small vocabulary there are no less than five hundred different words with which to describe every variety of marking to be found in the cattle. The exact shade of colour, the precise spotting or shading of their coats, the particularities of horn and muzzle, all have their name. And, where they have neglected their own history, the Dinka know by heart the generations of their herds, and can recite them back into the mists of the past. Their lives are, therefore, exclusively pastoral. Their diet is milk, and, scarcely ever, meat ; a fact which may account for the slimness of their physique. In summer, they live in little towns of tents among the water-pastures, at a day or two's distance from the Nile ; and, in the winter, when the floods have dried and there is no grazing left, they repair to their permanent

settlements upon the river-bank. The summer-villages are rings of a dozen or twenty huts; with low doors through which they have to crawl. Briars are torn up and built into a hedge around them, and they sleep, safe from lions and other marauding animals, with their herds lying down among the huts, under the vigilance of the fiercest dogs imaginable, who bark at every footfall outside the rampart. The permanent villages are much bigger and more elaborately built. They are the size of small towns, having, perhaps, four or five thousand souls dwelling in them.

It is the perfect picture of pastoral peace to think of the Dinka living for so many centuries untouched even by the rumours of any world but their own. Across the Nile live the Shilluk ; and that is all. But the Shilluk, a tribe of nearly similar origin to themselves, are more fierce and a degree more barbaric in culture. They know a little more than the Dinka, not of the outside world, but of the arts of life. And they provide the element of terror, the background of war, without which it is safe to assume that no human beings have ever existed. They go naked, like the Dinka, and are even more elaborately painted. A stature of seven

feet is more frequently met with than among the Dinka, and they wear a towering, high coiffure to accentuate it. Often, their hair is raised into a crown of seven points and dyed a bright and fiery red.

As it is, the Dinka are the most beautiful race I have ever seen. It is a wonder to me that no painter, and, still more, no sculptor, has gone among them to seek perfection. Their every attitude is a revelation. I have never seen anything to equal their walk ; and, in the furnace of mid-day heat, when they come down to the river-bank and bathe, the beauty of the sight is indescribable. The young maidens bathe in one place and the warriors in another. They offer the perfections of masculine and of feminine beauty. There is enough material, here, to occupy a great artist for the best years of his life. And no one has yet attempted to take advantage of this opportunity. Human beings are here to be seen in all their pristine and unspoilt beauty, uncontaminated, and without the constriction of clothes. Arcadian peace reigns, undisturbed ; and, if painting and sculpture are to be found in it, there is, also, poetry.

The Sudan is virgin ground, so far as any

attempt at serious writing is concerned. And its beauties have the most poetical force to them. This was my temptation ; and I resolved to make some attempt at a description of the scene. More particularly was I impressed with the first direct contact with the savages.

This can be best portrayed in the sublimated description of a long walk, begun before dawn. The path led down a beautiful valley, and, crossing this, so that they would intercept our path, two figures appeared. They were painted in the fashion of green that has been described ; and, together, they formed the most extraordinary apparition it has ever been my good fortune to see. It took one back five thousand years. We might have been walking in the fields below Mycenæ ; for this pair of negroes – I believe they were brothers – were a knight and his page. They paint themselves in this manner when they are courting, and this young knight, accompanied by his page to carry his finery of beads and feathers, was on his way to some neighbouring village. They walked hand in hand, as is the custom with negroes, for I have seen them do this in Morocco. They came up and spoke to us, not greatly astonished, and went on their way again, without looking

back, not in the least surprised that we were unable to understand their words.

Later on in the morning, we heard loud and persistent barking of dogs, and found ourselves suddenly close up against one of their villages of summer tents. The hedge of thorns rose, waist-high, and over it peered the adolescents of the tribe in their full *maquillage*, for we cannot call it their war-paint since war was not in their minds. Their faces, painted with red and green and white, and their bare arms and waists, suggested the actors at a country fair called from their tents at an alarm of fire or the escaping of a tiger. But, at the same time, there was the god-like certainty of their movements to account for, and this removed them from the tinsel. The whole ring of tents was no bigger in extent than a painted cloud, or the circle of a painted dome. They, themselves, were painted with the bright colours that merge into each other at a distance. So are frescoes, seen nearer to the eyes than was intended, or with the power of glasses. And this scene recalled one particular fresco, in the church of San Giovanni Evangelista, behind the Cathedral in Parma. The dome is painted by Correggio with a rampart of clouds, over

which, angels, who are wingless and of the age of these adolescents, peer down, or are at play hurling what would appear to be snow-balls at each other, or they may be some concentration of the sunlight that is so strong and violent that it litters the ground and can be gathered up and compressed by the hands. This Dinka village had the indifference to the white man that is a great part of their dignity, even if its real meaning is no more than a stupid lack of curiosity. As soon as they had satisfied themselves as to why the dogs barked and gave them warning, the disturbance had no more interest in their eyes. They went about their business and looked at us no more.

For all the rest of that day I lamented the absence of the painters and sculptors who should be established in these great natural studios – not only in the Sudan, but all over torrid Africa. The negro Sultanates of Bornu, Ashanti, Nigeria ; their warriors in quilted armour ; the dazzling dyed stuffs that they make ; great mud-cities like Kano, or Sokoto, with a hundred thousand inhabitants, or more ; Djenné, with its echoed architecture, its pylons from old Egypt ; Dahomey, where shipwrecked mariners from Portugal taught the art

of bronze-casting and the great school of negro sculpture arose ; the Congo, where ivory was carved with such subtlety and sense of beauty ; what is the Nile, in its infancy, and the Nilotic tribes, to this ?

These same qualities must be even more vigorously present in the Zulu, who are the parent-stock of the Dinka and the Shilluk. The Zulus had a great military history, under the famous Tchaka, who is said to have been responsible for the death of a million persons, an achievement that might be the envy of certain of our own politicians, were it not that the losses were on the enemy's side, and not on our own. Everyone has read in his childhood of the Zulu Impis, the black legions ; of their Spartan discipline ; and of the terror that they spread. They deserved a better fate than the pen of Rider Haggard and the pencil of Caton Woodville ! It was the Homeric Age, existing almost into our own times. But it is probable that their sons are now quickly degenerating. The white man is too near to them, and there is not the same benevolent Government to watch over them that there is in the Sudan.

The Dinka may be the attenuated ghosts of what negro warriors may once have been, but

at least there are no signs of their decline from this, and these curious refinements in their appearance are due, not to the decadence of the race, but to a change in their manner of life. They have ceased to be soldiers and are become shepherds. They live in true Arcadian simplicity, such as the pastoral poets of Alexandria and Syracuse had never seen.

The Sudan is a furnace, with the furnace-door opened for the draught at the hour of sunset. It is difficult to conceive how the Occidental can live in it. It is as artificial, for him, as life in a submarine or an airship. But these are the very contrasts that give it interest. And, having spent a mere three weeks in that extraordinary land, I am moved to prophesy that it will find, one day, the painter or the sculptor who is worthy to celebrate its peerless qualities. If it fails at the hands of poetry, the fault is mine, for this first attempt.

THE MOSQUES OF CAIRO

II

THE MOSQUES OF CAIRO

IN THE GREAT DAYS of her mediæval art, Egypt was one city – Cairo. During the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries building was in progress there on a scale that belittles even Venice and Florence, and a style had been evolved which allowed of strange and fanciful developments beside which the mosques of Stamboul might be the work of one man alone. Special attention was devoted to the point of view of the street, and a long narrow street at that. The façades had to be broken, continually, into new points of interest ; and, therefore, the exterior cornices of the mosques received a rich treatment calculated to draw up the eyes towards dome and minaret. The best instance of this is the mosque of Sultan Qualâûn. The features of this wonderful mass of building unfold themselves from a new point of view at every step. There is no building of

the date in Europe in which there is to be seen quite the same degree of close consideration for the spectator. And the intention behind it has been to please, more than to impress or to overawe. But this pleasure was not imparted through the flatteries of prettiness. It was done by details that led into one another like anecdotes, and kept the attention fixed in that way, by a sort of development out of the public story-teller's art. In fact, it is easy, after seeing Sultan Qualâûn, to realise that Cairo, and not Baghdad, was the city where all the fabulous tales of the East were set down.

The interior of Sultan Qualâûn is fine and magnificent beyond description. There is nothing as good as this in Stamboul, for it has an antiquity to which no Turkish building in that city can aspire. It possesses that quality of age and mystery which forms the beauty of St. Mark's, and the abstract, geometrical art of the Moslems can be seen here in its perfection. Nowhere else could it be believed that such a degree of significance could be attained through the intersection of spider-like webs and skeins, through the formal statement of rayed flower-designs, and through the symbols of an alphabet carried up and enlarged in their scope

until they reached to a tragical or epical significance.

Yet these things are to be seen expressed in the inlaid wooden doors, in the carved and inlaid mihrab, and in the friezes of the ceiling. The mihrab, in particular, is an instance of that sempiternal militant force of the Moslems. It is no longer a pulpit, but a tribune from which a declaration of war might be read.

There are other mosques in Cairo, hardly less splendid than this. Scarcely any towns of mediæval Europe had churches of a beauty and a grandeur of design that can be compared with the mosques of Qâit Bey, el Mu'aiyad, el Mârdâni, Sultan Hassan, Sultan Barqûq. They give an impression of overwhelming magnificence, and from the simplicity of their appointments they gain a grandeur which the Gothic cathedrals can never possess, with their crowded altars, tombs, confessionals, and choir-stalls.

Many other mosques, besides these, have the same character displayed with less force. And outside Cairo, the Tombs of the Mamelukes, with their crumbling disdainful grandeur, make a most violent attack on the imagination : those of Qâit Bey and Sultan Barqûq, in particular. The minaret of the first of these has no rival,

and its dome is of a sort not to be seen to the west of this. Both this dome, and the pair of domes above the tomb of Sultan Barqûq, represent the Orient in its legendary character. The dome of Qâit Bey is melon-shaped, and has a network worked over it to represent the veins in the cool rind of the fruit. The two domes of Sultan Barqûq, on the other hand, are war-helmets or casques. The interiors of both these tombs are most effective, and the pierced wooden lattices of Sultan Barqûq are a marvel of patience and ingenuity, arriving, in the end, at lightness, where, generally, heaviness and confusion would be the result.

The truth is that the age of Saladin and his posterity was a part of that same wonderful period, of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, which produced so many marvels of Gothic architecture, in its purer, more primitive phases, all over Europe. Under Saladin, Cairo was more, not less, civilised than London or Paris. Later on, under the Mameluke Sultans, and up till the Turkish conquest in the early years of the sixteenth century, architecture became modified in form and was less grand and imposing. In fact, it followed much the same development as the later Gothic architecture ;

but, until the mosques of Cairo have been seen, it would be impossible to believe that such effects could be arrived at from the material of alternate courses of red and white stone, which was their invariable use.

Cairo, as we may see from her monuments, was one of the great cities of the East, and the luxury of taste was of a refinement unknown elsewhere in the West for a thousand years, since the age of Justinian.

RELIZANE

III

RELIZANE

(The first pages of a book upon Morocco)

IT IS SCARCELY POSSIBLE to attach too much importance to a name. How many differences, for instance, lie between the words France, Italy, and Spain ! France is a flat, open country, of which spring is the typical season, so that the land is essentially green of leaf, green meadows, green vineyards, tall green poplars on little islands in the river. All this is implicit in its sound.

Italy, by contrast, has the noise of the sea upon its coasts, and the shape of the name leads down into the south.

As for Spain, that one syllable is enough to suggest its violent character of light and shadow. This comes from the placing of the two vowels, the a and the i, so close together, as though in male and female propinquity. They have a sort of opposite, contrasting value,

in which the weaker of the two is inevitably swallowed into the sound of the other. They are the black and white squares of a chessboard. They are the castles of Castile and the lions of Aragon. Or they are the Christian knights and the turbaned Moors.

And this brings us to Morocco, which, as a name, is but the corruption of Marrakech. The sound of the two words is much the same, except that Marrakech is more suggestive of a city, has more of the rustle of dresses in it, and of the noise of palm-fronds in hot winds from the Sahara. Morocco, itself, is sunburnt, dark, and swarthy, but with something white, like salt, thrown upon it. This is the snow of Atlas. But that has its magnificence only in the south, from Marrakech, and, meanwhile, there are the beginnings of Morocco. And it must be arrived at by sea, or else by road, through Algeria.

For a growing climax, for an excitement and an expectancy that never dwindle, there is nothing in all travel to equal this transition from Algeria into Morocco. It is not the contrast between evil and good, between Hell and Heaven, so much as a comparison of two Hells, the real and the false. Algeria is the pattern of the false Hell ; it is Europe and

Africa at their worst and most hopeless marriage. Morocco is the true Hell. Not a place in which people are unhappy or persecuted, but a region in which they have been left for ever. Indeed, the first walk one takes in Fez is like an excursion into the poetical Hell of Dante. For these are the wicked who have all our sympathy. They have been condemned for ever to live over and repeat their lives, just as the sinners in Dante's circles of judgment are still together, and their punishment is not separation from each other, but just the hopelessness of any change in their lot. Life in Fez is what it was, all over the world, seven centuries ago. It has the most wonderful poetry there is left in the world for our eyes to see. The Fazis have been condemned, they have been left behind ; and this it is which makes Fez, at once, the most beautiful and the most melancholy city on earth.

But we have not reached Fez, yet. We are still many hundreds of miles from its walls. This first chapter is to begin in disgust and end in pleasure, for such is the truth of the North of Africa if its coast is followed far enough into the West.

A terrible depression of the spirit starts from

the moment Algiers is reached. This old Corsair town has nothing left, even of its ragged clothes and golden earrings, unless it is the descendants of the pirates who are porters at the harbour and who still carry some suggestion of their ancestry in their swarthy skins and frayed turbans.

The glitter of their eyes, their proud moustachios, their loud defiant voices, proclaim an individual hostility. There are no alliances ; every man is against every other man, and the older pirates, who are too decrepit to do heavy work, are the most vociferous in this call to arms. They yell out at their loudest, strike all the attitudes of desperation and despair, urge on the victorious, and revile the vanquished. Hassan, Ali, Mohammed, Achmet, are names shrieked through the air, and the fact that so many of them are called by the same name makes the confusion far worse.

These are the true Algerines, who still keep something of the ferocity of their forebears. But, for the rest, the town is no better than Limoges or Lyons. The natives have had all their individuality driven from them and have lost their pride of carriage. Besides, the whites outnumber them by three to one. So far as the

town is concerned, they are a dying race. It is too late. Nothing can be done for them.

There is no art at Algiers. There never has been, and there is none within hundreds of miles. There is no art, and there is no life, either. The only colour in the streets is from the uniforms of the Spahis.

But some miserable vestiges of the past are still to be seen in the old town, above Algiers. It covers a very small area, and it slopes almost as steeply as the face of a cliff, so that there is not a level street in it. It has precipitous paths, as rough as the bed of a mountain-stream, and great flights of twisted steps.

A strange silence hangs over it, as though this multiplicity of corners had been designed specially to deaden sound.

Nearly all those who pass by are old, and they are tall and solemn. I remember a gigantic negro, who toiled up the steps like a huge ghost. He was of the porphyry sort, of that darkness which is not to be believed, and, as if to enhance it, his dress was of ordinary deep black, which looked pale by contrast. The silence and solemnity were impressive as he came slowly up the steps with his long staff. He had the air of a survivor from some appalling catastrophe.

I remember, also, a pair of blind beggars who stood like statues in niches. They never moved.

But the old town is over in a moment. Its extent is so small. And only the very old, or the very poor, still live in it. Outside, it is Limoges or Lyons again.

Of course, the country is different. It is on a generous scale, huge and unbroken, rich and red. And there are flowers and plants never seen before. But there is something animal about its richness. It is living clay. It is almost the flesh, or the fat, of some animal come up from the south.

A little further from the coast, the first hills begin and the mountain gorges still have their population of monkeys. So, at this point, it is no longer Europe. Something else has begun.

But the only natives who are in the least interesting are the roadmenders. They live in tents, as close to their work as they can get. The women are dressed in blue, and have blue tribal-marks upon their chests and foreheads. They are a nomad tribe, so that their wandering instinct has found a good outlet in repairing the roads.

For the rest, there are the usual provincial Frenchmen, with perhaps just this sacrifice to

circumstance, that they wear breeches instead of trousers. This is the sign that they are colonists. The Arabs, on the other hand, are miserably poor. They have no property ; none of them have farms ; the moneylenders claimed all that, a generation and more ago. They only own the very poorest kind of shop.

Of signs of their religion there are practically none. No mosque is to be seen bigger than a small summer-house ; you never hear the muezzin, and perhaps they are losing their religion as well as everything else. On the other hand, there never was architecture here, and none of the arts ever flourished on this soil.

The Algerians, as we have said, have neither good taste nor bad taste : they have no taste at all. But white domination came to them at the time of the darkest age of European culture ; it dispossessed them of their property and it drove out all that remained of colour and of life.

Tunis, by contrast, was more fortunate. It was occupied by the French some half-century later than Algiers, and it still preserves some semblance of independence under a reigning dynasty deprived of all executive power. It was nearer to Egypt and to Italy ; it was amenable in size ; it was not cut off from the

rest of the world like Algiers. There is less monotony, for it changed more with the times. The passage of the centuries can be recognised in its buildings. Also, Tunis is without rival among Mohammedan countries in the gay colours of its dresses, while Algiers was never distinguished for this.

Even the classical remains in Algiers are a disappointment. Timgad and Djemila, both of which were founded by the Emperor Trajan in the first century, were Roman military settlements. They were the works of military architects and not of real craftsmen. Timgad was, in fact, the headquarters of the Third Legion, and the soldiers were employed at its construction. It is a proof of Roman expansion and thoroughness, but it is not a specimen of Roman art. There is no mention of Timgad in classical literature ; it was a prosperous military and commercial centre of entirely provincial importance. It is, therefore, ridiculous to compare it with such colonies as Leptis Magna, in Tripoli, which, as the birthplace of Septimius Severus, was embellished by him with statues and buildings that were the work of the best architects and craftsmen of his day. Nor is Timgad of a comparable importance to El

Djem, for the amphitheatre in that Tunisian town held as many as sixty thousand spectators, and Timgad cannot have had as many inhabitants inside its walls.

It may, indeed, be said that the traveller who arrives in Algiers will be disappointed with everything he sees – and long, weary miles stretched ahead from Algiers. There was no sign yet of any improvement in the country. Orléansville, the foundation of Marshal Bugeaud, was a conspicuously unpleasant place in every possible way. It had been left over from the latter part of the reign of Louis Philippe, and it gave the effect of a penal colony of that date. But worse was to come than Orléansville, and its name was Relizane.

When we got to Relizane it was noon, and noon is the hour of rest. The heat was formidable, desperate, and what wind there was panted in little gasps just loudly enough to stir the dust. It would begin like a quick gust of temper, would spring round upon its heel, whirl up into a spiral, and be gone like the snuffing of a candle. And soon it would come again, near by, as though there could never be peace or calm, as if the leaves had never given shade at mid-day, as if all living things

had not the ghosts of shadow, their own ghosts of their own height, to hide in.

This town of Relizane is a French colony, and so it has a square, or *place*, in the middle of it, and here stood the only hotel in the town. But what was this upon the ground? It was trussed like a chicken. It moved. It walked. It rather hurried. There was, as well, the clumsiness of the grasshopper about it, for its legs were jointed the wrong way, and their ends, where the feet should have been, were stunted and withered. In fact, they were not feet; they were knobs of flesh, all dusty and stained from the road. They were trailed along it; they were never used.

Instead, he used his hands, and they were protected with wooden soles, tied over the wrists with a band of leather. This was how he walked, dragging his legs behind him.

This terrible being, who was young – not twenty years of age – smiled up in a happy way out of the dust, as though there was some good joke at the traveller's expense. He knew no better of life than this, and could not suspect on whom the joke really rested. But it seemed irresistibly funny to his half-idiot brain, and he found it difficult to compromise between

a smile of welcome and a roar of laughter.

The grin made his face round and young, and it credited him with a little more sense than he really possessed. His skin was yellow and dusty, with marks, like scratches, on his face where the dust had been rubbed ; in fact, his colour was that of the true Algerian. And he wore a newly bought fez, which, somehow, added an additional horror to all his circumstances.

There was every sign that he would wait outside while the travellers ate their luncheon in the hotel, and, with this to look forward to, we walked in. It was a commercial hotel. The walls were covered with coloured engravings given by manufacturers of cheap goods, and a few of them had calendars attached. It might have been any hotel in the French provinces, somewhere sufficiently far south for the flies to be troublesome.

This pest was very evident in the dining-room, but it was crowded, in spite of this, with Frenchmen who were resident in the colony, who hung up their hats every day on the same hook, and bowed every day, in the same direction, to the same fellow-guest.

The proprietor had greater pains to spare for

travellers who had arrived in their own motor-car, and he came towards us, menu in hand, with a peculiar, mechanical slowness of gait. He was lethargic, leaden of step, and seemed unable to raise his head from his chest. He shuffled towards us in slippers, never lifting his feet from the ground. But the heaviest thing about him were his eyes. The eyeballs were immensely swollen, and showed such an area of white round his pupils that he was given a perpetual stare. It was difficult to believe that he could shut his eyes.

His personality seemed to be embedded in, as it were, a film of white wax, under which he could just be seen moving. He made one think of the larva of an insect, of a grub in its cell. He was comfortably established, and would feed on the food so close to his body.

But he was ill, very ill, very lethargic, very sluggish. His life must be a trailing misery to him. So the iron of Relizane was entering into the soul. There was not a thing about the town that was not horrible.

It was not easy to eat, until the sight of the black scullions brought a sort of reassurance with it. And there were some barefooted negresses in bright colours, with folded red

turbans, who came in with dishes of food and never spoke a word, but gave their due of domestic atmosphere to the scene. Dark skins can never look dirty beside pale ones, and, indeed, the sight of a white person in the kitchen of this hotel would have been the final horror of Relizane. The stained table-cloths were as nothing to this possibility.

Luncheon over, there remained that person to be confronted who was waiting outside the hotel. He had been joined by others ; and now we were told that something had gone wrong with the motor, which would mean a delay of half an hour. There was nothing to be done. The only course was to climb into the motor and wait.

The most extraordinary fantasia of beggary played itself before the eyes, and it would be impossible to imagine a more complete epitome of misery from its sharpest and most dramatic angles. This was what mean whites had brought to the *indigènes*, and, in recoil, it was springing back upon themselves, as shown in the sleepy-sickness of the white hotel-proprietor. That was almost the least of these possible evils. For, at any rate, it was a dulling, a padding of the senses. He was only just conscious out of

that film of white wax. He could shuffle round to his customers, could speak to them, could even add up their bills. Probably he was born in Relizane, for as a settlement it is some eighty years old ; and, if this was so, he was being paid back for some of the faults of the older generation. They had much to answer for.

But there was no time to think of him, for these evils before the eyes claimed every moment of attention. While this lasted, nothing else in all the world existed.

The first beggar had been joined by five or six more, and they huddled close together, each odiously near to his hated rival. This suggested that they lived as much upon each other as upon the spectator, and soon the truth of this began to play.

The original beggar was the oldest of them all : the others were hardly more than children. It did not seem as if a single one of them had the strength or the ability to hold himself upright. They were all crouched in the dust.

The next one to catch the attention had withered arms, and his hands, by that curious atavism of the idiot and the imbecile, were long and thin like a monkey's, but flat and twisted, with no life in them, as though this

was a monkey whose fingers had been caught or crushed in some trap or machine. It must be hard for him to feed himself with those hands that could hold nothing.

The other children were just as bad. One was thin as a rake, with ribs showing through his shirt ; teeth, preternaturally big, that could be seen, or so it seemed, through his drawn cheeks ; and skin like dusty parchment unduly stretched. Another was a speechless imbecile, whose guttural, uncouth sounds in their more ordinary mode of idiocy were even somewhat of a relief before the more extravagant horrors of the rest.

For they were covered with sores that the flies did not neglect, or were crippled in such violent fashion that their parents must have twisted back their limbs, soon after birth, as you break a stick for the fire, that does not quite part, but hangs down beside itself, with nothing but the bark, or skin, to join its severed pieces.

The whole lot of them were now sharing in the joke, and it kept them so amused that they never looked up at us. They felt our eyes on them instead.

The joke was of the eternal sort ; it was probably months, or even years, old.

The one of them whose sores were the worst flourished a stick in his hand. He had begun to wave this about as though he meant harm with it, and presently, at his bidding, they all shuffled themselves nearer to that thin child with the yellow parchment skin. He was playing with a rosary of wooden beads, the sort the very poorest Mohammedans hold in their hands. This must have been his only possession, other than his clothes ; but he was so stupid that he did not know it was in danger, and kept telling the beads idly with his fingers. It was just a facet of their joke, just a little thing touching its circumference, only an episode.

Another moment, and he was given a nasty hit on his hands and the rosary was wrenched away from them. Immediately his face curled up and he began to cry. But he never moved, or made the slightest attempt to get away from them. He sat perfectly still, and nothing in him had altered except the expression of his face. The corners of his lips turned up, as if with the taste of something bitter, and presently – but only presently – the tears came. His crying was of an ugly, chattering sort, but the others were not going to allow him to monopolise the attention for ever.

Instead, they moved on to the idiot-child who could not speak, and, at once, their plan revealed itself. He could not talk, but they were going to make him cry. A good hit in his ribs with the end of the stick soon accomplished this, and it was a hearty, ordinary cry, perhaps the only normal thing it was in his power to do.

Meanwhile, the original beggar – the one who had been there all the time – was dreading trouble. He started to tremble, to shake all over, from head to foot, as if the blow had fallen already. It was like a kind of palsy. It made one wonder if he had not been shivering all this time unnoticed, because of the worse horrors he had wrong with him.

Another bully had come up and joined them, and his powers of evil were only held in check – were only delayed, as it were – by an atrophied leg, strapped down, as if he was kneeling on one knee, on to a wooden stump. What speed he had was the result of hopping on the other leg ; and he seemed to think that he was late for the fun by the hurry with which he arrived.

He might have been the brother of the bully with the stick ; and the pair of them, together with two more who seemed to have nothing

worse wrong with them than a nest of sore places, were now the only ones still appreciating the joke. The others saw it from a different side.

The next thing was going to be a quarrel between the two bullies for the possession of the stick. The newly arrived bully had the advantage of mobility over the other, and he hopped about in a way that reminded one of boys on a football-field when they play about before the game begins, and one of them will keep his foot on the ball while he hops on his other foot. They were both roaring with laughter, showing their white native teeth, and apparently enjoying themselves.

But they closed and grappled with each other, and the stick had changed owners in a moment. The new bully had been left out of the fun. He was going to catch up and enjoy himself. His way of doing this was to give a hard knock to every one of them. And the crippled wretch who had been crying for nothing was given a real pain to weep for.

But the others, when they were given their second hit, stopped crying. The bully knew who were the weak ones, and, while the others had gone silent from anger, he gave more

blows to the dumb child, and hit, again, the hopeless cripple and the shaking yellow child. The others had begun laughing once more : it was very funny to be on the safe side of the trouble.

What use was it giving them money ? If one gave to the weak, it would only be taken away by the strong the moment one's back was turned. If things were nasty, now, they would be far nastier, then. There would be an orgy of bullying ; but it was impossible to resist giving, and so the most appalling of them got a handful of coppers.

Meanwhile, the three weakest of them were still crying, and there seemed to be no reason why they should stop, having once begun. They were born into the world crying.

As for the child with the yellow parchment skin, he was still shuddering, but dryly, for his face showed no sign of tears.

But the war, having died down, now began all over again. Apparently the results had not been good enough. The skeleton child with the yellow skin knew what was coming and wept out loud. Even those who had stopped crying kept silent and looked serious. This time the bully meant to hurt them.

He had already struck a blow at one child when the door of the hotel opened and a Frenchman came out. He went up, at once, to the bully, took the stick away from him, broke it in two with his hands, and threw it away.

Then the whole truth dawned. They were blind, all blind. There was not one of them who could see.

But the Frenchman was not sorry for any of them. He kicked at every limb he could reach.

They squirmed away, touched at the wall, and were gone. A moment or two later the motor was repaired and we left the town.

We saw a huddle of rags down the corner of the next street, and, in the midst of it, stood, or as near as possible stood, the two bullies. They were sharing out the coppers.

So another truth was apparent. They were a concert-party. It was organised brutality, and they had not cried for nothing. But that, also, was the bully's part of the business. They had to see to it that the tears were genuine.

And, before they had stopped quarrelling, we were a mile or two from Relizane, on the road to Oran.

ORAN

IV

ORAN

THIS IS A TOWN of emphatically Spanish echoes, for it was a possession of Spain during the greater part of three centuries. The very nearness of Spain had cast a new complexion over the whole landscape. Andalusia was opposite. Oran had been captured for Spain by Cardinal Ximenes, in the reign of Ferdinand and Isabella. Towns like Cartagena, Alicante, Almeria, were not far away : for hundreds of years they must have been in direct communication with Oran.

And the name of Oran reminded me of two other things. It made me think of Borrow's description of a negro galley-slave whom he saw working in the hulks, in some southern port of Spain. He was a criminal from Oran, and his gigantic height and appalling bestiality of face were mentioned by Borrow as among

the most fearful of his memories. It was easy to believe this ; for but little of the softness of life is to be found there. It must be one of the hardest, toughest towns out of America. There is a ferocious air about the poverty of its native quarter, a sort of grinding, bellowing strength, as though its attending horrors were compulsory, as though its victims were condemned to it and had no escape.

The other thing of which this town reminded me was the *Tauromachia* of Goya, for one of the most famous matadors in history came from here. He appears in it plunging furiously about the arena, mounted on the back of the bull, holding a short spear or dart at arm's length before him. He is dressed as a Moor, in turban and full trousers, but without a burnous, and, somehow, the very nature of his costume adds terror to the scene. It breaks the ordinary rhythm of the bull-fight and adds an extra brutality to it, so that we think of some final twist of cruelty, such as the *banderillas* dipped in sulphuric acid that Théophile Gautier saw in use in the arena at Cadiz.

It seems to be the end of the *corrida*, and, as soon as the Moor has finished, the crowd will be let in to contemplate his bloodstained

work. The scene is dark and dramatic ; flares will soon have to be lit. This Moor must, in truth, have been a terrifying figure. He must have given up his faith ; have abandoned all hope of Paradise for these bloody lawns of sand ; and certainly Goya did full justice to him in this tremendous etching.

It will be obvious, if only from these contingent memories of it, that Oran is of a very different atmosphere from Algiers ; and, once Oran is left behind, the country becomes more interesting every hour. The road led for many miles along the edges of a mere of salt water. This was appropriately brackish and lugubrious, and, while we followed its great length, there was time to think that only twenty miles away, on the other side of it, lay Sidi Bel Abbès, a town familiar in films and in sensational articles as the headquarters of the first regiment of the Foreign Legion. Everyone has heard of the Foreign Legion ; the legionaries have been constantly before the public for the last two generations, almost as though they were acting for it in person. The author of *Memoirs of the Foreign Legion*, a book with a magnificent preface by D. H. Lawrence, gives an account of Sidi Bel Abbès which leaves but little to the

imagination, and that little has been necessarily left out.

And, when passing so near to this town, it was impossible not to recall a certain anecdote about a drunken legionary, told to a paper by an Englishman who had witnessed the scene. The legionary clattered noisily into the kitchen of a small restaurant in Sidi Bel Abbès, asked the frightened woman what there was to eat, and, on being told that it was too late, that there was nothing, took up a carving-knife, cut off a pair of his own fingers, and called out to her: "Very well, then. Cook these!" This story may, or may not, have been literally the fact, but there is no doubt that it has a synthetic truth, for, if there are some perfectly charming persons in the Foreign Legion, there must, also, be some characters with whom this episode would be strictly in keeping.

But it was raining, that day, and, even if Sidi Bel Abbès was normally visible across the mere, we could not see it, that morning. It had to be left, as ever, to the imagination; nor were we to have an opportunity of hearing the band of the Foreign Legion, which the guide-book described as playing selections of martial music, nearly every evening, in the *place* of the town.

Instead, it rained ; and, not only that, but a mist or fog lay over the salt waters. And it was remarkably heavy. It did not cling like little clouds of cotton wool to the sides of the hills, but it lay in a thick bank upon them, completely level and flat as to its under-surface. This meant rain as well as fog.

The effect of the fog was to imprison the mind and cut it off from all the sights or images of the days before. Oran had been like a far-off contact with Spain, but this had faded back into the distance the moment the coast was left. Every other place or thing became equally remote in memory. Relizane and Algiers had no more real existence than Tibet or the South Sea Islands. The world was this present moment, this immediacy of mist.

And, as the road began to climb, the fog became worse. But all its effects were not of dullness, for wherever there was a wall it shone and glistened from the stones.

Tlemcen was only a little way ahead, and in the three or four hundred miles from here to Algiers this is the first town with any pretensions to architecture, or to art of any kind. What impression would it make, this first contact with the art of honeycomb and stalactite ?

THE ABBEY OF NĀLANDĀ

V

THE ABBEY OF NĀLANDĀ

(From The Three Indies, an unfinished book)

THE TEMPLES OF INDIA are too lofty and ponderous, and too many in number, to be compressed into any census or catalogue. Their myriad eaves, crowded with a thousand figures, ranged as close together, head above head, as the tiers of spectators at football-match or bull-fight ; how can any Western mind understand these, or know them by their names ? Each figure has its separate niche in their mythology, and those legends are more distinguished for complexity than beauty. They form, indeed, a kind of vast psycho-sexual vapour given off by the teeming millions of population. They are a mass of conscious and unconscious symbolism, of dreams dimly remembered and elaborately improved, and the whole great fabric is a jungle into which there

is no time to venture in the normal span of one life, even were there inclination for it.

But it is this very complexity, this jumble and tangle of limbs, these leering grimacing masks, that must be ignored. They represent the Indian decadence, and are only the products of the last few centuries of Hindu caste-rule. By then, the Buddhist religion had died out of India and the period of greatness, alike for Hindu and Buddhist, was over and dead. But India is a part of the world that has carried a great population for far longer than any country in Europe. It had cities of half a million or a million inhabitants, when no town in the West had more than a hundred thousand, and these later and fictitiously typical temples are the work of that slum population. Such is Benares, and it is safe to ignore Benares so far as any works of art, but not its wonderfully varied human types, are concerned.

Instead of that, we will go back to an example of what the antique beauties of India must have been in the time when India was the classic ground of inspiration and prophecy, and when its holy places were objects of pilgrimage to all the scholars and curious minds of the old Orient.

But, first of all, the eyes must be prepared for those essential differences in heat and colour. Every edge, every cornice, quivers and vibrates. Nothing can be looked at minutely, or for long, so that any detail has double intricacy. The whole focus must be changed. Does that make things nearer, or further away? Let them be nearer, nearer, so that they lie upon the eyes! There is no mercy; the days are like this as soon as they have begun, and every bright surface glitters and turns to flame. Peace and tranquillity are induced by the shady trees and the shadows of the hills; there are sacred lakes to cool the eyes, and sacred groves propitious for meditation.

This is the first and nearest to us of the Indies, and it is strange enough, but more for its new and peculiar beauties of nature than in the actual works of human hands, for we find ourselves in an old time-worn abbey, and there is no novelty in this to Western eyes. It is the flowers and the colours that are strange, and the mind through which we see them, for our authority came out of the still more distant East.

“ A red wall surrounds the whole abbey. Its precious towers are arranged in correct order of

height ; pavilions adorned with coral lift themselves into the air like the tops of hills ; soaring domes stand in the middle of the clouds and their pinnacles seem to be floating above the vapours of the sky. The observatories are lost in the mists of the morning, and the upper rooms tower above the clouds. From the windows one may see how winds and clouds ever produce new shapes of beauty, and above the soaring roofs the conjunctions of the sun and moon may be seen. And we may add that, all round, the deep translucent ponds bear on their surface the blue lotus with its spread petals, intermingled with the Kanaka flower of deep red colour, and at intervals the mangroves spread over all their shade.

“ The outside courts, in which are the priests’ chambers, are of four floors. The storeys have dragon-projections and coloured eaves, and the pearl-red pillars, carved and ornamented, the richly adorned balustrades, and the roofs covered with tiles that reflect the light in a thousand shades – all these things add to the beauty of the scene.”

This description is from the hand of a Chinese pilgrim, Hsiouen-Thsang, and the scene was a great monastery called Nālandā.

It was near the modern Patna, and all there is left of it, now, are the groves of mango-trees and the basins of the sacred tanks. It was not alone in its class ; there were many others like it. How pathetic it is to think of those beauties lost to us, and of the world the monks relinquished when they went behind the red wall of the abbey ! They had withdrawn from one earthly paradise in order to be sure of another. Time was nodding, nodding, nodding, in those flower-hung days.

The holy places of the Buddhist world stretched for a thousand miles along the Himalayas, from hot Bengal to high Kashmir, for it was in the Himalayas, in Nepal, that Buddha was born, and all his life was passed in the snow-cooled heats. The lotus was to his legend what date-palm and fig-tree are to the desert-faith of Islam. That gives the difference of bare aridity to a creamy-petalled blossoming in cool tanks under heavy-laden boughs.

The Himalayas make the most stupendous mountain cliffs in the world. They are double the height and five times the length of the Alps, and depending upon them is a mountain-region as big as Spain, Italy, and Greece, put together. Every fine thing in Europe could be

contained in this little bit of India, and that dead world of Buddhism must be thought of with this ample ground for its extension and with every circumstance that gave it natural beauty and fertility. The cold airs from the mountains produced calmness and sanity, so that there was none of the delirium of ornament, the jungle of design, which usually characterise Indian art. Instead of that, the great school of mental repose grew, and blossomed, and brought peace of mind.

When Hsiouen-Thsang went to Nālandā, it had already been in existence for seven centuries. Six successive Indian kings had embellished and adorned it. The founder of the abbey, in the first century after Christ, was King Nagarjuna, who introduced, there, the Mahayana, or "Greater Vehicle," and made it the seat of that school for all Central India. It was the Royal Observatory, and its water-clock gave correct time to all the kingdom of Magadha.

Hsiouen-Thsang lived there for two years. This traveller, coming out of the Golden Age of China, visited on his pilgrimage the eight holy places of Central India and the four great Stoupas of the North. A century and a half

after his time it was all finished. Buddhism had disappeared from India. It remained in Burmah and Ceylon. But the old sites were evacuated, much as Christianity was driven out of the old holy places of the Church. It is as if Hsiouen-Thsang was describing to us, just before the Saracens or Turks destroyed them, the ancient glories of Jerusalem and Alexandria, of Antioch and Constantinople.

This pilgrim went to Buddhist India in the seventh century after Christ. There had been generations of peace and plenty, so that the things he saw were already hoary with antiquity. The Buddhist civilisation had lasted nearly a thousand years, and its development, in that lapse of time, makes an almost exact parallel to the first thousand years of Christianity. There was the death of Buddha ; the conversion of Asoka, who formally established the faith, and whom it is difficult not to compare to Constantine ; and there were the four Great Councils of the Buddhist Church.

But, in the seventh century, many of Asoka's buildings were already crumbling into ruin. It was the wreck of a great civilisation that Hsiouen-Thsang saw ; a lost world, gone so long ago that it is hard to conjecture its lost

beauties. If much was gone in his time, how much less is left now ! Hardly one stone lies upon another ; there are fragments of sculpture, and the ground-plans of buildings can be made out, but there is little more than that.

Nothing but the imagination can help us, and we must cast about for hints of what life may have been. Let us try to depict one of these great monasteries, with another traveller's tale by our side to correct our narrative.

First of all, there must be a mountain, and let it be broken by a long and deep ravine. The sides of this are clothed with great trees, many centuries old, and their branches are peopled, at all hours of the day, by crows, by piebald magpies, and by ravens with yellow beaks.

Behind this, the dwellings of the monks rise in an amphitheatre. They are all of different sizes, and all have little balconies, or belvederes. The houses lived in by the elders of the convent fly little banners to distinguish them, and these wave on the breeze from small hexagonal turrets. Mystic sentences are written on the banners in big red, or black, letters ; and phrases of the same sort are painted on all the doors, on all the walls, and even on the paving-stones. The narrow alleys between the houses

are crowded with some of the four thousand monks of the monastery in their red robes, many of them having a yellow mitre, like a crest, above their heads.

Imagine it at night, under a ripe moon, round and ready to drop into the harvest ! The peculiar and gigantic shapes of the Buddhist temples show up like huge phantoms in the air. On every side of them are the white houses of the monks. There is absolute silence, only broken by dogs barking. They are baying idly at the moon, in a sort of hypnosis from the strange, white light. Now and again there is another sort of interruption. It is the rumbling of a loud and melancholy conch-shell, blown to tell the watches of the night.

The next night was the twenty-fifth day of the moon, and, because of this, there was no question of sleep. It was hardly possible to close the eyes before, as if in a dream, there seemed to be a great concert playing high up in the air. The confused and mixed voices of a huge multitude became gradually more clear and distinct.

The courtyard, outside, was lit by a wavering, pale light that seemed to come from above. A ladder leaned against the wall, and, having climbed its rungs on to the roof, the most

extraordinary scene lay before the eyes. The terraces of all the monks' houses were lit up by red lanterns that swung to and fro from the ends of long rods, or perches. All the monks, in their robes of ceremony, and wearing their yellow mitres, were sitting on the roofs of their houses, intoning prayers. These numberless lanterns, with their reddish, fantastic glare ; the convent buildings, lit up palely by the reflections from all those trembling lights ; the voices of the four thousand monks, throwing up their vast concert of prayer into the night ; and the mingling with this, from time to time, of trumpet-sounds and the blowing of sea-conches — all these things induced a chill, indescribable terror.

All at once, the monks stopped their prayers ; and, suddenly, the trumpets, the clocks, the drums, and the sea-conches sounded out, all together, three separate times. Immediately after that the monks burst out into the wildest cries, like the howling of savage beasts. It was over. The ceremony was finished ; the lanterns were snuffed out ; you could hear the ladders creaking, and all was silence again.

THE KAILASA OF ELLORA

VI

THE KAILASA OF ELLORA

WE MUST NOW SEVER CONTACT with all the accustomed trappings for our eyes. A Buddhist temple is much nearer to us than a mosque ; there are a hundred details of ritual to remind us of Roman ceremony, and the serenity and wisdom of their philosophy kept a tight hand upon design and ornament. But the religions that flourished side by side with Buddhism, and then reigned instead of it, had no control of this sort. All the panoply and profusion of savage art were let loose by them, and the Western mind grows impatient with many of its examples.

It seems as if, in India, the home of mysticism, new religions had begun in cataleptic calm and ended in hysteria and pandemonium. It is, at the same time, a most idle charge to bring against the Indian temples that they do not harmonise with the landscape they are set in.

If the landscape is beautiful, then so are the buildings, for it is impossible to think of the one without the other. Climate and environment have made their effect, and the multiple ornament tallies with the shapes of tree and flower.

But it is not only conditions of climate that wrought these effects. There had to be, as well, a congenial policy and a wealth conducive to such prodigality of labour. There had to be thousands of hands to employ, and nothing else for them to do.

In Southern India the situation was most admirably suited for these things to happen. That was the scene of the Dravidian activity or frenzy.

The Dravidians are followers of Siva and Vishnu. They speak the Tamil language, and there are, at this day, between forty and fifty millions of them. All their temples are contained in the Presidency of Madras. Their history, as builders of any importance, lasted for about a thousand years – down till the middle of the seventeenth century. Since then, they have entirely lost their skill and enterprise. All they do, now, is to daub their old temples with coats of coarse paint and whitewash. Much sculpture has been nearly obliterated by

this practice, and the crude colours give a hideously ugly and barbaric character, spoiling the movement of the figures, cloying their action, and blunting both their outline and their mass. The only satisfactory thing about this decadence, from the English point of view, is that it began several generations before they came under our rule, and we cannot, therefore, be blamed for it.

The secret of their past energy – and it is the decisive factor in most of Indian history – was nothing more than immensity of population. Wars and famines, inertia and greatness, plague and prosperity – all these are questions of birth-rate. The employment, in Southern India, of only one half of the population in agriculture is sufficient to produce food for the whole community, and this leaves the other half of the race free for any employment that is available. The rajahs and feudal lords had immense revenues, which they could spend in no other way than in works of ostentation. In certain stages of civilisation this is as necessary for the employment of the masses as for their own glorification. Perhaps a similar state of affairs was responsible for the buildings of the Pharaohs in ancient Egypt.

Once this is understood, it is only the skill shown that is surprising. As Fergusson remarks, to cut a chain of fifty links out of a block of granite and suspend it between two pillars was, with them, a triumph of art. The same authority enumerates thirty great Dravidian temples, or groups of temples, any one of which must have cost as much to build, in money and in labour, as an English cathedral, and some a great deal more.

But, apart from these comparisons of scale, these temples have no likeness to anything the eyes have seen before, and it is only if we confuse their purpose with those that churches are put to, and were intended for, that they suffer in the contrast. They must be taken more narrowly for what they are ; and must be credited with what are so often supposed to be their own mistakes. Crowded, confused planning is, after all, a kind of mental simile for heaped and piled-up wealth. Cold reserve, deliberate restraint, in this respect, would mean lack of enthusiasm, want of conviction. The Indians must be allowed their own taste, and it need not conform to English standards of what was beautiful in the great epoch of our own prosperity, the nineteenth century. Even

Fergusson, who, though he is contradicted so often by modern research, remains interesting and unique in his class, sometimes made mistakes indicative of his prejudice and faulty imagination. Thus, in the Kailasa at Ellora, he calls the capitals of the pillars "pudding-capitals," when, really, they are based upon the amalakata, or water-lily fruit. He seems, in ways like this, to have missed much beauty of imagery.

Fecundity, prolixity, were objects of worship, rather than chastity and purity. The carnal pleasures were not only encouraged, but demonstrated in sculpture ; they were part of the harvest of nature ; but, here again, the climate was more beautiful. The great heats were licentious in their prodigal bright colours, in their quickness of growth, and in the stinking, terrible decay of death, which thing, alone, gave a much greater importance to life. The differences in life and death were visible to every eye. The fatalism and indifference of the East have their centre in other regions than this. Cold is an indispensable part of that ; and the proof of it is that it is China, where the winters are icy, that is the home of calm, and of the placid acceptance of death. The Hindus

cared for life, and it was no part of their philosophy to make these conditions of life and death as like one another as possible. They had probed too deeply into the extremities of spiritual experience for this.

Just as they can no longer build, so has all their spiritual prowess departed from them. The eyes of our own time are disappointed in everything that we see of them. It is difficult, even, to find a fakir who is not merely an impostor upon those ancient athletes in holiness. In their day, they must have been terrifying.

That is what Bernier says of them in the seventeenth century, and they were in decadence, then : “ Some of them have hair hanging down to the calf of the leg, twisted and entangled into knots, like the coats of our shaggy dogs, or, rather, like the hair of those afflicted with that disease of the Polish Jews which we call ‘ La Plie.’ Numbers of them are seen, day and night, seated, or lying, on hot ashes, entirely naked. Some keep their arms lifted up ; the frightful hair of others hung loosely, or was tied and twisted round their heads ; some carried a club, like that of Hercules ; others had a dry and rough tiger-skin thrown over

their shoulders. Several of these fakirs undertake long pilgrimages, not only naked, but laden with heavy iron chains, such as are put about the legs of elephants. I have seen some who stood, whole hours together, upon their hands, the head down and feet in the air ; and others who stood upright, without any other support than might be afforded by leaning forward against a cord for a few hours during the night ; their legs, in the meantime, were swollen to the size of their thighs."

This is an appalling catalogue of horrors, but our own religion had exhibitions of exactly the same nature, and the most that can be said against it is that India is a more appropriate background than the Irish bogs or the Russian snows. Such excesses seem natural to India. The temple-porches would look empty without them ; they are as much in place as the sentries outside a palace.

The ancient world of India must have been full of them, and, at the other end of the scale, the Indian kings glittered in a steady tremolo from their jewels. They were dressed in white clothes spotted with golden roses, and wore wreaths of diamonds on their necks. Their heads were diademed. Poets wearing masks

and dressed like birds were allowed to speak their opinions aloud to the monarch. The groves of champak-trees drenched all the airs with the odour of their blue flowers. As for the king's women, they were covered with gold, and their slaves basked in the sycamore shade, behind the lattice.

Such was the idleness and satiety of wealth, but its true prodigies were accomplished in other spheres. These were the temples we have set out to describe, and we find ourselves in front of the summit of all Dravidian accomplishment – the Kailasa of Ellora.

It is unlike any other Dravidian temple. It is cut out, not built up ; but, even so, it is not like Ajanta or any of the Buddhist excavated temples. The Kailasa is not an interior hewn out of the rock, but the model of a complete, built temple, such as might have been erected on plain or hillside. The rock has been cut away, externally as well as internally. At Ellora there was no exposed rock or cliff-face into which to dig ; all the stone was underground. So, first of all, an immense pit had to be dug. This was two hundred and fifty feet long, one hundred and sixty wide, and, in places, one hundred deep. It was a huge

quarry, and, as the stone was cut away, they left, standing in it, a full-size double-storeyed temple. Round this they grouped a series of magnificent chapels and monastic halls cut deep into the rock. The next step was to hollow out an interior in what was already excavated. In fact, the whole affair was a matter, not of building, but of sculpture.

When this amazing taking of pains was accomplished, the Kailasa was the absolute and permanent replica of an erected temple, finished in every particular both within and without. Even the nail-heads of the wooden timbering – though, of course, they were not there – were worked into the stone. The surrounding walls, the accessory chapels, the monastic buildings, all were there. The temple-enclosure copied the traditional temple-plan. Its pattern was after the form of a primitive Aryan village. The mandapam in the middle stood for the assembly-hall. The lankesvara chapel on one side, and its corresponding chapel opposite, mimicked the north and south cow-gates of a village. The battlements of the screen-walls copied those of a fortified town or village.

As for the temple as a whole, it faces the

setting sun, and this gives it some measure of safety in the morning. Then, is the time to see it ; before the throbbing grey heats, the walls of mist, flash their steel mirrors on the eyes. The sky might be full of chariots, there is such a flash of wheels, so soundless is the rattle and clanging, so hidden is that hurry of mailed bodies in the air.

Before there is too much distraction of glare and heat the effect given by the Kailasa is of such brilliance as can be experienced nowhere else. It appears to be of white marble, and it shines and glitters as if lines of silver had been worked into it at every accent of cornice. The shadows in porches or under arches are of deep, splendid gloom, and give an almost sexual opposite to those areas of beating, trembling light. They are as male to that female, and the one could not be so deep and pompous if the other was not so light and brilliant. Behind it all stand the broad, planed surfaces of smooth dressed stone on the sides of the quarry, and these give a continual reminder to the eyes of how this whole episode is taking place, as it were, in a new medium – as much so, indeed, as if it were built out over the water. Perhaps the detail that induces this mood of

feeling more than anything else is a feat of construction that has not yet been described. It is a matter of sculptured bridges.

The first bridge leads from the gateway of the Kailasa to the great porch, and the second bridge leads straight on, out of that porch, into the temple. Both of these bridges are actually cut out of the rock. There would have been no span of air beneath them if it had not been cut away ; and if the rock of the bridge, itself, had been demolished, those gateways and porches would have been left hanging, as it were, in the air, with no means of reaching to them, until a bridge was built, stone by stone, across the hollow chasm. These bridges are works of sculpture, and this knowledge makes the Kailasa, extraordinary as it is, more odd, still, in purpose and accomplishment. The worked roofs of the temple just come up to the height of the quarry walls ; it is as if some landslide, some earthquake, had ripped open the bowels of the earth and revealed these temples standing inside, though, even so, the mind refuses to accept the truth about the manner of their construction, and prefers to think of them as having stood within some great cavern from which the roof has fallen. So it seems to be

another world thrown up by chance out of the inner darkness.

All in all, this is one of the strangest affairs in the whole achievement of the dark-skinned races ; it is all in vain and meaningless ; but this, which destroys any beauty in so many other temples, has, in the case of the Kailasa, given the very point, as it were, to all the pointlessness. It is on such a scale of waste and prodigal labour that the mere effort has really become an end in itself. In India this is a rare thing.

